

Underneath the Arches – John Copeland

Many Burton villagers will be familiar with the sight of the man dressed in an army camouflage jacket, thick mauve trousers and heavy boots, and a rolled knapsack on his



back, to be seen most days standing by the bridge over the by-pass, or sitting on the adjoining steps, looking as if he was about to go off on a military manoeuvre.

Having stopped on a number of occasions to speak to him, initially having mentioned that I was on the Parish Council, to which he replied: “Do you want me to move onto the other side of the road?” I suggested that it might be interesting if I could interview him for an article in The Burton Journal, and much to my surprise he readily agreed. On a cold and windy May afternoon, with the traffic thundering past above and below us, I therefore sat speaking to him on the steps, enquiring about his life, and what kind of developments had brought him to Burton, living rough underneath the arches.

He told me that his name was Mark Carver, and that he was born in Skegness 40 years ago. His father was a Polish soldier and his mother a gypsy, but the marriage broke up, and he was sent to a Children’s Home at the age of six months, remaining at the home until he left school at 16. Secondary education was at the Lumley School at Skegness, which he left at 16, telling me that he gained 11 CSEs, 10 with grade one, and one with grade 2. He then began a 5-year apprenticeship as a landscape gardener, but later went to the Lincoln College of Technology to study bricklaying, subsequently beginning a 4-year apprenticeship as a bricklayer.

Finding work, though, was not all that easy, and he had many jobs over a period of years, eventually meeting the girl who was to become his wife. They had four children, three daughters and a son, but the eldest girl died of leukaemia, breaking his heart. “It was downhill all the way after that”, and divorce followed the ending of his marriage after ten years.

On his own, he moved around the country, ending up at one stage in Yarmouth, where he lived in a rented room in premises catering largely for immigrants. His days were spent doing odd jobs, mainly for pensioners, getting steadily into debt and finding it difficult to pay for the accommodation as work became more difficult to find. Yet immigrants who arrived off the plane at Stanstead airport, and who came to live at the premises, were all working within 24 hours

Unfortunately, the Chinese proprietor of the premises, whom he called “Mr. Willy” after some notorious Chinese character he had read about, soon decided that the immigrants were a far better paying proposition.

He was paying £100 a month for his room, whereas the immigrants paid £225, even though they were working for much lower wages than he was prepared to accept. Eventually, after being given 28 days notice to quit, he was thrown out onto the street by Mr. Willy, having nowhere to go.

To this day he feels resentful and bitter about the facilities granted to these immigrants. “It’s a matter of pride”, he told me. “I’m an Englishman. I don’t mean British, I mean English. I respect the Queen. When people think of a tramp, they think he fits into one or more of three categories: he’s a drug addict; he’s an alcoholic, or he is mentally unound. I am none of those things. I don’t drink; I’m not into drugs; and I only smoke occasionally. Every Sunday I go to church - to the one by the Burton Road roundabout, and I keep myself clean and tidy. As I say, it’s a matter of pride.”

I went down to look at his accommodation in an alcove under the bridge. Stretched out on the concrete, partially surrounded by walls covered with graffiti, was his bed, set up on a base of polystyrene blocks that had been given to him by a builder, helping to keep out some of the cold. His sleeping bag, which during the day he carried rolled up on his back, was covered over at night with a large blue tarpaulin. In these sleeping arrangements he had endured the bitterly cold nights of the recent winter, the temperature on one night going down to -20 degrees. .

“I certainly felt that”, he explained, telling me that conditions were worst when the wind was in the west, his sleeping quarters being exposed to the elements from that quarter. A northerly or east wind was not so bad, the archway walls keeping off the cold. Even worse, though, than the bitterly cold nights were the rats living nearby. “There’s scores of them on the other side of the bridge - the Lincoln side, and I see them every night, scores of them and huge things they are, too: you’ve never seen such large rats in all your life!” At which point he spread out his hands, eighteen or more inches apart, to indicate the size, tail not included.

Recently, he woke up in the middle of the night to find one of these large rats right by his face, trying to nibble at his sleeping bag. On trying to throw the rat off, he was badly bitten on the hand, but managed to kill it. The bite necessitated several visits to the hospital, having injections and two blood tests. He took the dead rat with him, telling me that the staff put it in a jar, never before having seen such a large one.

When I asked him what he did about money, he replied that he received £32.53 a week from Social Security, and was expected to have his clothes washed at a laundrette and to keep himself generally clean. This income was supplemented by doing odd jobs for elderly residents nearby, and by begging in Lincoln, though he did not like going into the city to ask for money. “The poorer people are the ones who give you something. The rich won’t give you a thing, not a penny. They just look at you, and then quickly look away”.

Apparently he had some confrontation with a young lady driving a Mercedes, who did not give him anything, regarding him with contempt, almost loathing. "I see her passing by in that posh car of hers every day, and every time I see her I give her the finger sign, saying 'Up you, you bitch', if you will excuse my French".

Other motorists were obviously far more understanding, sounding their horns when they saw him on the bridge, one woman even stopping to hand over some sandwiches that she had made especially for him. Another donor had given him a radio. As I spoke to him, several lorries and cars hooted, obviously recognising his presence, and he waved back. "Some pass by at the same time every day, and they all hoot", he explained as a large lorry passing along the bypass sounded its horn.

I asked about how he spent his day. "I usually wake up about 6 o'clock in the morning, and then walk into town to go to the toilets by 'The Strugglers', coming back to wash in a little bowl that I have". Then he has breakfast, depending on whether he has any money to buy food. Sometimes, he told me, he has gone without food for four whole days, but it is not so bad now.

The rest of the day is then spent doing some odd jobs, and then it is bedtime around 9 o'clock, depending on the time of year. "People sometimes ask me why I haven't committed a crime, but I would never do so. As I said, I go to church every Sunday, and I have my pride".

During the day he sees a great variety of wildlife. "Recently I've seen a pregnant vixen that comes by early in the morning, almost at the same time every day. I wave to her, and she stops and looks at me for a few seconds, and then walks on, taking not the slightest notice of me. I've seen her every day for the past four days. And then there are all the birds, of course - and those bloody rats".

Asked about his hopes for the future, he indicated that his main priority was to get a roof over his head, though he had received little help from charities or the City Council. The Nomad Trust had rejected him, and after filling up a form from the YMCA he had heard nothing more. His greatest condemnation, though, bringing forth some further French, was reserved for the City Council, whose officers were spoken of in the most unflattering of terms. There was a hope, though, that he might be offered a room by a landlord quite shortly, but having been let down so many times in the past, he was not optimistic.

As I made my departure, having taken a photograph of him and his living accommodation, he waved me off as I started up my scooter. "Remember what I always tell you - look after yourself. See you soon", he shouted out as I sped away, back to a comfortable home. Maybe, though, if Glum Gordon ever becomes Prime Minister, we will all be living underneath the arches.

Since this article was prepared, Mark Carver has been offered accommodation and has departed from Burton.

JC

LINCOLNSHIRE POLICE SAXILBY RURAL POLICE OFFICE.



CRIME UPDATE.

With the onset of summer it is worth a mention regarding home security please remember if we ever get any sunny hot days!!! then if you are out in the garden then remember to lock your front door, try not to leave windows wide open and lock all your tools and lawnmowers away after use, it is the time of year when we see an increase in thefts from sheds and garages, please don't leave handbags or wallets lying around near windows and widow ledges. Also please do not leave car keys lying around on work surfaces and near open windows a number of recent thefts of vehicles from driveways have been via the keys being removed from areas within the dwelling.

BURTON CRIME.

There has been a number of crimes in the first half of the year - 9 at Burton Waters mainly vehicle crime and 10 in the village area. These were thefts, 2 damage, 2 burglaries and 1 drink/drive case.

COMMUNITY POLICING TEAM

A new Neighbourhood policing system is being introduced by the government. This area will be one of the first areas to benefit from having a panel of locally placed persons in the community to serve on a voluntary community panel, to bring to notice and review community policing problems. They will work in partnership with the local police officers who will be called the community safety team- made up of Pc's Martin Clarke/Nick Willey and Pcsos Andrea Smalley and Louise White together with identified special constables, who will all work from the Saxilby Police Office. Other agencies will assist as appropriate. A network of other community members will be established to provide feedback to how the problems respond to attention by the team. The community panel is limited in how many members may take part, but is open to development, together with the individual network, and local residents may be approached on a voluntary basis at a later stage. The new teams have been created in order to forge closer links with the local community with a view to tackling anti-social behaviour and various other community based policing issues.

Burton is a village with relatively little crime and disorder but if issues arise then they can be addressed proactively by the community policing team.

Have a safe and crime free summer.

Pc Nick Willey
Pc Martin Clarke
Community Beat Team Managers
Saxilby Police office.